

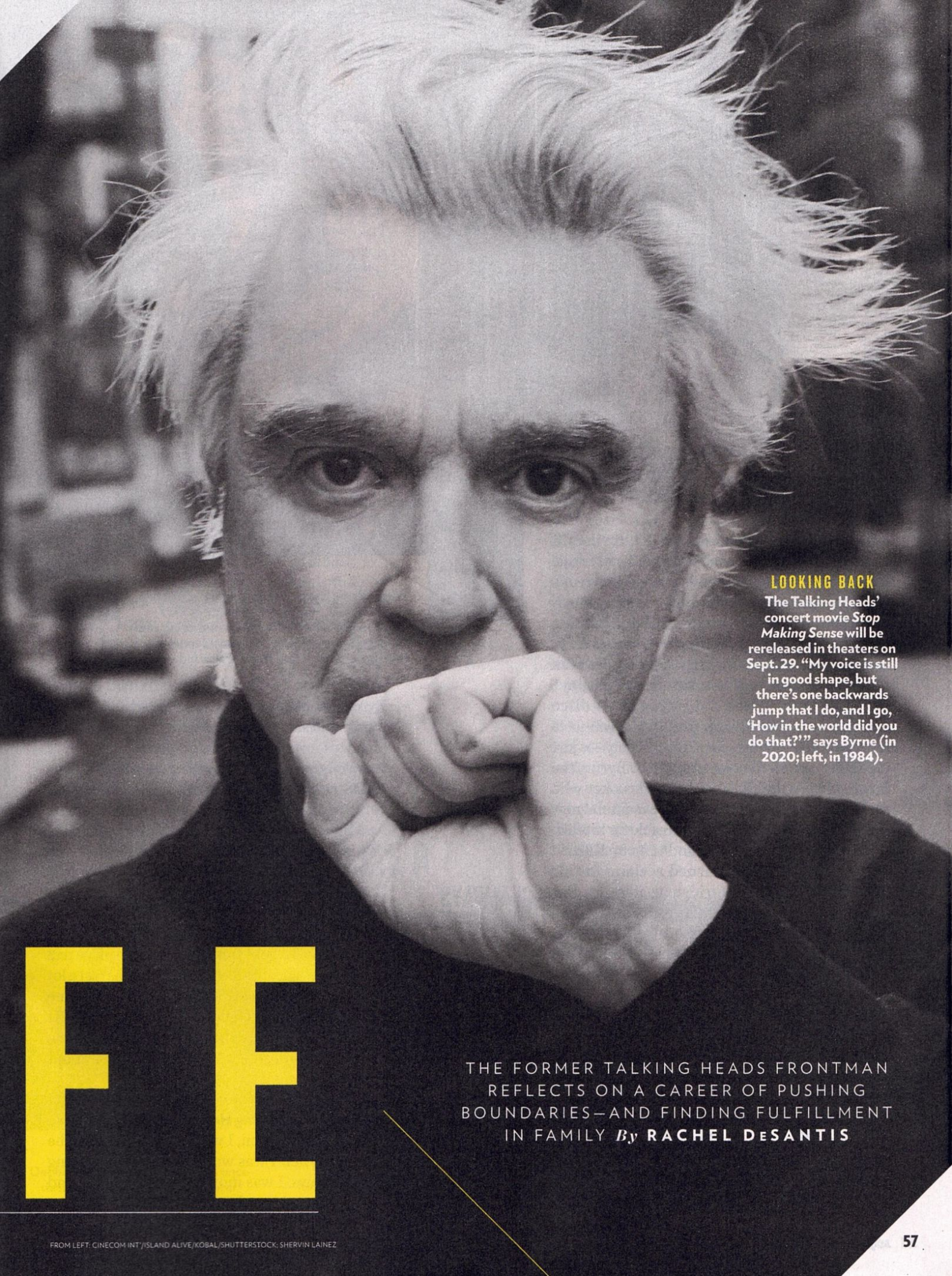
DAVID

BYRNE'S

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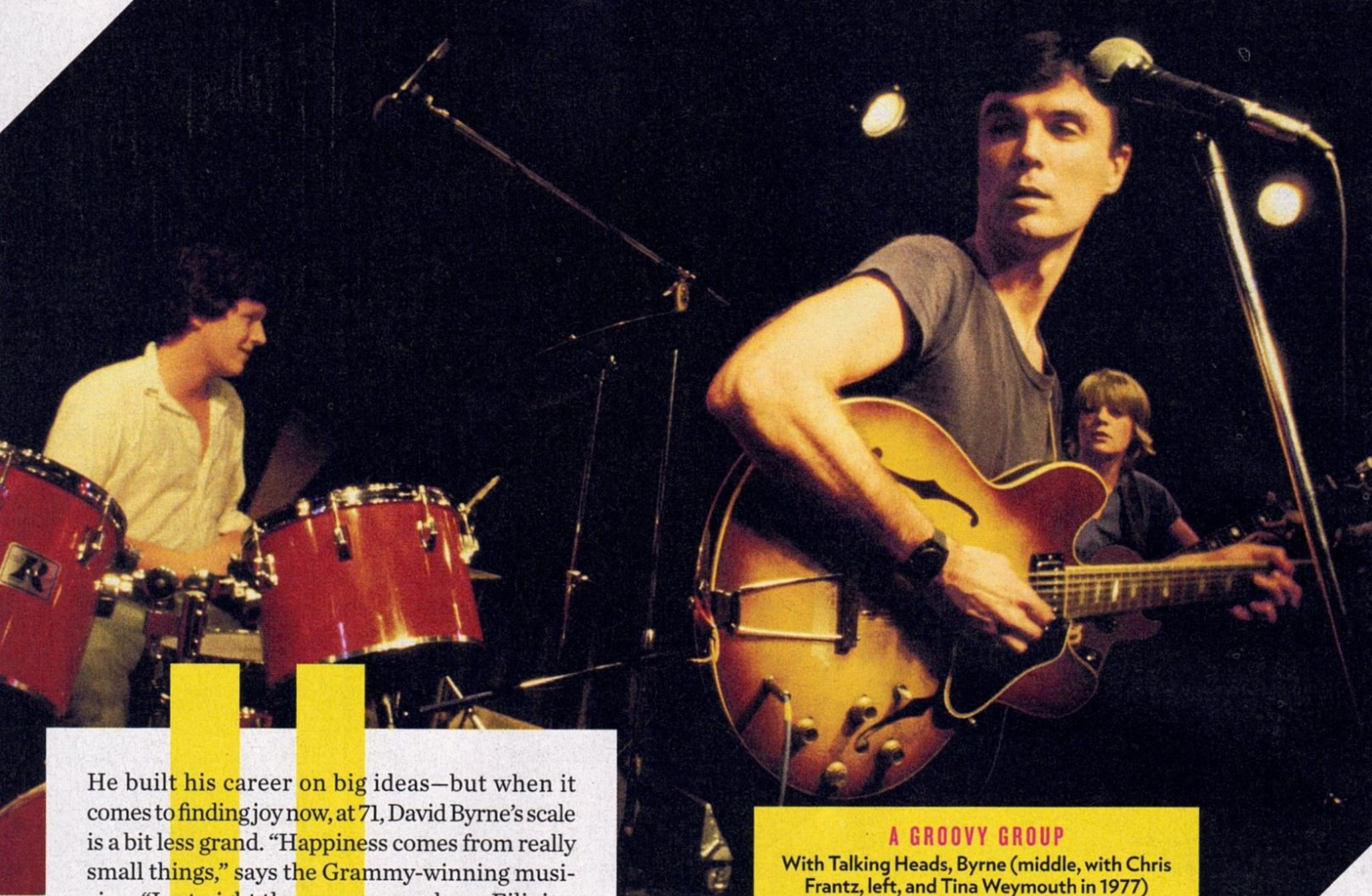


LOOKING BACK

The Talking Heads' concert movie *Stop Making Sense* will be rereleased in theaters on Sept. 29. "My voice is still in good shape, but there's one backwards jump that I do, and I go, 'How in the world did you do that?'" says Byrne (in 2020; left, in 1984).

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THE FORMER TALKING HEADS FRONTMAN REFLECTS ON A CAREER OF PUSHING BOUNDARIES—AND FINDING FULFILLMENT IN FAMILY *By* RACHEL DeSANTIS



He built his career on big ideas—but when it comes to finding joy now, at 71, David Byrne's scale is a bit less grand. "Happiness comes from really small things," says the Grammy-winning musician. "Last night there was a very large Filipino community group who came to *Here Lies Love*, and they reacted to things that nobody else even noticed in the songs. That made me very happy." *Here Lies Love*—Byrne and Fatboy Slim's disco opera about former Philippines First Lady Imelda Marcos that opened on Broadway in July—is just the latest out-of-the-box project for Byrne, the Scottish-born and Baltimore-bred rocker who first found fame as the frontman of seminal new wave band Talking Heads, responsible for hits like "Burning Down the House" and "Psycho Killer."

In the group Byrne earned acclaim for his unusual lyrics and eccentric stage presence. But in the 30-plus years since they disbanded he has established a prolific solo career spanning music, theater, film and more. After turning his album *American Utopia* into an acclaimed Broadway show in 2019, he took home a Tony for the project in 2021. And in January—36 years after winning an Oscar for scoring *The Last Emperor*—he received his second Academy Awards nod, for Best Original Song for "This Is a Life" from *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. "As a younger person, I could never have conceived that I'd be doing the things I'm doing now," says Byrne, who's dad to daughter Malu, 34, a jewelry designer (with ex-wife Adelle Lutz, a costume designer). "Not everything succeeds. But you've got to try." Here

**'I ALWAYS
WANT TO
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MYSELF'**

—DAVID
BYRNE

A GROOVY GROUP

With Talking Heads, Byrne (middle, with Chris Frantz, left, and Tina Weymouth in 1977) released eight albums. The band—including Jerry Harrison (not pictured)—last played together at their 2002 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction.

Byrne breaks down what he's learned about fame, family and staying passionate.

It took Byrne years to be comfortable in his skin.

I think as time goes by, you change as people. I was very uncomfortable socially as a younger person. And then over time, that kind of dissipates a little bit. I've become quite a lot more comfortable socially. I give a lot of credit to music too. You often hear people say that music saved their life when they were in high school or that kind of thing. But I think it's true for me too, as a performer. When Talking Heads went from a small four-piece to a nine-piece band, the feeling onstage was just a lot more ecstatic and celebratory, and it helped me get out of myself: "Get over yourself, David." It helped me let go a little bit. And the music became much more uplifting and danceable, less about angst and paranoia.

He regrets the Talking Heads' abrupt breakup.

As a younger person, I was not as pleasant to be around. When I was working on some Talking Heads shows, I was more of a little tyrant. And then I learned to relax, and I also learned that

collaborating with people, both sides get more if there's a good relationship instead of me telling everybody what to do. I think [the end] wasn't handled well. It was kind of ugly. [Drummer Chris Frantz said in 1992 that Byrne "just decided to leave" without discussion.] Divorces can be ugly, even if you don't intend them to be. It can be really difficult to navigate. I have regrets on how that was handled. I don't think I did it in the best way, but I think it was kind of inevitable that would happen anyway. We have a cordial relationship now. We're sort of in touch, but we don't hang out together.

Being in love is nice, but so is solitude.

I enjoy being in a romantic relationship [Byrne was married to Lutz from 1987 to 2004]. It's really good to talk [even though] sometimes it's unpleasant to go, "Hey, that hurt my feelings." But you have to do it. Otherwise, it builds up resentment. But I'm also happy to be alone. I go to a restaurant counter and eat alone and read a book. Sometimes people look at me and go, "Oh, look at the poor man. He doesn't have any friends." But I'm totally happy doing that.

He cherishes his role as a father and grandpa.

Most of the joy comes from just seeing Malu be excited about what she's doing. When she first went to college, I think my influence was almost negative in that she wanted to go to a fashion school to learn the *business*. She said, "I don't want to be an artist." But then she realized, "Oh, you have to learn accounting and all this stuff." Then she said, "Maybe the creative side isn't so bad." [Byrne's 5-year-old grandson] Bo is discovering the world. He hears some of my music from my daughter, but I'll make up songs and sing them to him and see what he likes.



FAMILY TIME

"For a father, that's really wonderful," he says of seeing Malu (with Byrne in May) find her own path as a jewelry designer. Right: Byrne with grandson Bo in 2020.

Inspiration can strike at any moment.

I'm old enough to have gone to big discos when dance-music acts like Gloria Gaynor and Freda Payne were performing. The DJs saw their evening as being like an arc, where they'd get the audience excited and bring them back down again, then get them excited again. I filed that away, and then years later, I read that the former First Lady of the Philippines, who was this bigger-than-life figure, loved going to discos. I thought, "Wow, she lives in that dance-music disco bubble. Maybe that's a metaphor for how it feels when you're in a position of power. I wonder if that's a story that could be told the way I imagined the audience on a dance floor." Seeing the show with an audience has been a very emotional experience for me.

Retirement is entirely unappealing.

I think I'd be bored. I can't pretend I haven't been lucky in a lot of these opportunities, but I also always want to challenge myself and do something that I haven't done before. And sometimes those leaps require an act of faith, but I think it really pays off. ●

A ROCKIN' CAREER



BLONDIE AMBITION

Debbie Harry (in '91 with Byrne) once declined to join the band but later sang with the Heads after his exit.



AMERICAN DREAM

Byrne won a special Tony for *American Utopia* in 2021.



FRESH TALENT

"I'm inspired by what they have to say," he says of young stars like Miley Cyrus (in December 2022).



BROADWAY BOOGIE

Jose Llana and Arielle Jacobs (in June) star in Byrne's latest musical, *Here Lies Love*.